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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/MELISSA BUCK AND EUR/NB KEITH ANDERTON
AND KATIE GARRY

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TAGS: [FI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER: PDAS VOLKER'S SEPT. 13-15 VISIT TO
HELSINKI

REF: A. HELSINKI 416
[1](#)B. HELSINKI 639
[1](#)C. HELSINKI 682

SUMMARY / INTRODUCTION

[1](#)1. (SBU): The Embassy warmly welcomes you to Helsinki and views your visit as a key opportunity to advance the most important issues on the US-Finland agenda. Afghanistan and NATO top the list, as both are the subject of intense domestic political discussion right now. Many in the new government are eager for Finland to increase aid and troop commitments to NATO/ISAF, but they face a tough political battle with the opposition and with NATO skeptics within their own governing coalition. A similar debate surrounds a pending decision on joining the NRF. Your public and private messages can help tip the Afghanistan and NRF arguments in a positive direction. Your official meetings offer opportunities to bolster our already strong collaboration on Kosovo and, perhaps, to chart a more dynamic course on Russia, democracy in the Near Neighborhood, and Finland's 2008 OSCE Presidency. On the public diplomacy side, NATO and Afghanistan will again be key, and we also stand to make some headway with strong messages on climate change, missile defense and the Middle East. "Watch-out fors" include lethal weapons for Afghanistan, which has become politically very difficult here, and insistent requests by the Finns for POTUS and SecState meetings. END SUMMARY.

AFGHANISTAN

[1](#)2. (SBU) Finland's solid contributions to NATO/ISAF and to Afghan reconstruction will continue; our challenge now is finding ways to help the GOF do more. Afghanistan will receive \$12 million in annual assistance for at least the next six years, and the GOF is finalizing the transfer of most if its 104 peacekeepers from a Norwegian-led PRT in Meymaneh to the Swedish-led PRT at Mazar-al-Sharif. We hope to see Finland increase its troop commitments, with a view toward taking leadership of the Mazar PRT in 2009. The Finns embed a small, highly effective civilian liaison team at Meymenah that targets development projects to support the PRT and which has won kudos from US commanders in Afghanistan for its effectiveness in building local community support for the PRT's efforts. Taking leadership at Mazar in 2009 would allow Finland to implement that model there.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Domestically, Afghanistan is the subject of an intense political debate right now. At the time of your visit, the government will be finalizing a major report

that examines all aspects of the security situation and makes recommendations on how/if Finland's role there should expand (Reftels A and B). The MOD and MFA would like to see increased troop contributions to NATO/ISAF, PRT leadership in 2009, and more development and counternarcotics assistance. Conservative Party members of government -- led by FM Ilkka Kanerva and MOD Jyri Hakamies -- support these recommendations, but are running into increasingly vocal opposition not only from outside government, but also from the NATO nay-sayers within the governing coalition (in particular the Center Party). We intend to include some of these skeptics in the events on your schedule; your public and private comments to them indicating the value the US attaches to Finland's current contributions; how impressed we are with Finland's PRT-CMO coordination model; and the importance to Washington of what Finland is doing in Afghanistan will be extremely timely and can help influence the autumn debate in a positive direction.

"WATCH OUT FOR" NO. 1: LETHAL WEAPONS TO AFGHANISTAN

¶4. (SBU) Washington and Kabul have long hoped that Finland would make a lethal weapons donation to support the Afghan security forces. However, this issue has become political poison here and threatens to derail our efforts to get Finland to do more in Afghanistan. President Halonen adamantly rejects the idea, and PM Vanhanen is clearly uncomfortable with it. Even Conservatives like Hakamies, who personally support a donation, have backed away, recognizing that pressing too hard could cause Halonen (and probably even Vanhanen) to veto their efforts to have Finland do more in Afghanistan in other areas. At this juncture, we should avoid pressing the Finns for a lethal donation that could

derail our efforts to achieve other important goals such as more troops, more aid, and PRT leadership.

NATO AND THE NRF

¶5. (SBU) Finland has EU Battlegroup commitments through mid-2008, but the MOD and MFA see Finnish participation in the NRF as a good complement to the Battlegroups -- a view we have actively supported. Conservatives in government would like nothing better than to join Sweden in formally announcing that Finland will join the NRF at NATO's Global Force Generation conference in November, in hopes of standing up troops for the Danish-led NRF in ¶2010. Unfortunately, the die-hard NATO naysayers in government (Center Party) and in opposition (about half the Social Democrats and some smaller parties) who adamantly oppose Finland's joining NATO have now begun alleging that the NRF is simply a 'slippery slope' to NATO membership. Their argument is of course specious, and messages you deliver that (1) point to how the NRF can complement EU Battle Group participation and (2) clarify that NATO membership and NRF participation are entirely separate decisions will help keep this debate fact-based.

KOSOVO

¶6. (SBU) Kosovo is one of Finland's highest foreign policy priorities. The GOF has been one of our staunchest allies and has worked hard behind the scenes to ensure EU unity in support of Ahtisaari's final status. Finland has more than 400 troops on the ground, provides extensive aid, and is actively engaged in the CFSP Planning Mission. The GOF is quietly becoming concerned that the lack of a way forward may begin to undermine international efforts and will not support delays beyond the current Troika-led negotiating period (Reftel C). The GOF has not made a national decision as to how it will react at the end of the current negotiating period if Kosovo unilaterally declares independence, and is adamant about not publicly discussing any kind of Plan B. That said, officials

will welcome an exchange of views on this and will be open to Washington's latest thinking.

RUSSIA, DEMOCRACY AND THE NEAR NEIGHBORHOOD

¶17. (SBU) The general views of the USG and the GOF are in close harmony when it comes to support for democracy, civil society and human rights in Russia and Europe's new neighborhood. Finland is already engaged in some activities that complement US Freedom Agenda goals, including support to environmental NGOs in Russia; educational exchanges in Russia and Belarus; and funding for the International Humanities University for Belarusian exiles in Vilnius. GOF leaders have hosted high-level meetings with Belarusian opposition leaders, with Serb moderates, and with pro-democracy forces in Ukraine and the Caucasus. The Estonian Bronze Statue crisis also emboldened the GOF to move away from the traditional Finnish propensity to acquiesce to Russia on tough issues. Indeed, under the new government the GOF has begun publicly to challenge Moscow's policies and actions in ways the previous government eschewed. The GOF is recognizing the need to speak out on heavy-handed Russian trade practices -- especially on energy issues and timber tariffs which directly affect Finland. Most recently, MOD Hakamies used his Sept. 5-7 visit to Washington to identify Russia as Finland's single most important security challenge.

¶18. (SBU) Many Finns, however, are not yet fully comfortable with challenging Russia, and there is lingering reticence about taking too high profile a role in pressing for greater democracy elsewhere. You can nudge interlocutors in the right direction by expressing appreciation for what Finland (and certain Finns, like Ahtisaari and EU Commissioner Olli Rehn) have done in these areas; by encouraging greater US-EU and US-Finland coordination in dealing with Russia; by encouraging Finns to play an even more active role in showing public support for pro-democracy leaders; and by urging high-level Finnish visits to countries where they can reach out to democratic forces -- with Belarus, Ukraine and the Balkans being perhaps the best fits in this regard.

FINLAND'S 2008 OSCE PRESIDENCY

¶19. (SBU) Finland's agenda for its Presidency has some positive elements, as well as others that are of less interest. In the latter category, for example, Finland's announced focus on European inland waterway issues is less than stirring from a US perspective; however, by emphasizing our priorities we can encourage more leadership in other areas. One option is democracy. Finns can be counted on to focus heavily on the good work the OSCE does with election monitoring and institution building, although the GOF will need active support from us and other like-minded countries in countering the efforts of certain OSCE members to weaken the Organization in these areas. On a particularly positive note, the Finns have told us that they intend to use their Presidency as a springboard to become more involved in promoting democracy and freedom within many member states -- an initiative that, with the right encouragement, could have a very positive impact on our Freedom Agenda priorities (see above).

"WATCH OUT FOR" NO. 2: HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS

¶10. (SBU) The Finns will use their OSCE Presidency (as well as other issues) to press for S-Kanerva and POTUS-Halonen meetings. While the S-Kanerva meeting in June was very successful for both sides, you will want to be prepared to urge the Finns to be realistic about how difficult it is to schedule these high level visits.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

¶11. (SBU) We have programmed a heavy dose of PD into your schedule, including an on-the-record speech (Topic: "Finland, NATO and Afghanistan"), a "background" lunch roundtable with leading editors and columnists, and an on-the-record session with the electronic media and print journalists. As noted above, your messages on NATO/ISAF and the value the US places on Finland's doing more in Afghanistan are the most timely and topical at this moment. In addition, there will be strong interest in the Administration's newest efforts to confront climate change; in terrorism and other security-related issues; and in your general assessments of the trans-Atlantic relationship, NATO/EU cooperation; the US role in the Middle East Peace Process and, to a lesser extent, Iraq; and the current policy environment in Washington. All your PD events offer a good opportunity to present the facts surrounding Missile Defense, and the Finns will be particularly interested in whatever you can share regarding US efforts to create a dialogue with Russia.
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